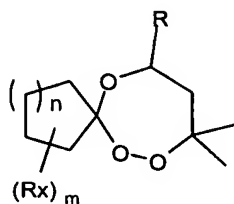


Amendments to the Claims:

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Original) A process for the preparation of lactones by decomposition of a 1,2,4-trioxepane according to formula (I)



(I)

wherein

R is H or CH₃;

n is 1-14;

Rx independently is any substituent on the ring structure, including substituents which form bi- or tricyclic structures; and

m is 0-34.

2. (Original) A process for the preparation of lactones according to claim 1 comprising the steps of
 - (a) heating a small amount of a suitable medium to the temperature at which the 1,2,4-trioxepane decomposes, and
 - (b) subsequently adding said 1,2,4-trioxepane to the preheated amount of medium while controlling the reaction temperature.

3. (Original) A process for the preparation of lactones according to claim 2 wherein the medium is a linear or branched alkane solvent, preferably selected from the group consisting of nonane, decane, undecane, dodecane, paraffin oil, Isopar[®] solvents, and Shellsol[®] solvents.
4. (Original) A process for the preparation of lactones according to claim 3 wherein the solvent comprises an Isopar[®] solvent, preferably Isopar[®] H.
5. (Currently Amended) A process for the preparation of lactones according to ~~any one of the preceding claims~~ claim 1 wherein the small amount of medium is between 0.01 and 1.5 parts by weight of medium per part of 1,2,4-trioxepane starting material.
6. (Currently Amended) A process for the preparation of lactones according to ~~any one of the preceding claims~~ claim 1 wherein the 1,2,4-trioxepane is added in the pure form if it is a liquid at room temperature, or in the molten state or dissolved in a minimum amount of a suitable solvent if it is a solid at room temperature.
7. (Currently Amended) A process for the preparation of lactones according to ~~any one of the preceding claims~~ claim 1 wherein the 1,2,4-trioxepane is a reaction product of hexyleneglycol hydroperoxide or isopreneglycol hydroperoxide with a compound selected from the group consisting of cyclobutanone, cyclopentanone, cyclohexanone, cycloheptanone, cyclooctanone, cyclononanone, cyclodecanone, cycloundecanone, cyclododecanone, cyclotridecanone, cyclotetradecanone, cyclopentadecanone, cyclohexadecanone, cycloheptadecanone, cyclooctadecanone, camphor, norbornanone, ethyl 2-oxocyclopentylacetate, ethyl 6-(2-oxocyclopentyl)hexanoate, 3-methylcyclopentanone, fenchone, 2-methylcyclopentanone, methyl 2-cyclopentanonecarboxylate, 4-t-butylcyclo-

hexanone, menthone, 2-methylcyclohexanone, 3-methylcyclohexanone, 2-phenylcyclohexanone, 3,3,5,5-tetramethylcyclohexanone, 2,6-dimethylcyclohexanone, bicyclo[3.2.1]octan-2-one, 2 B-cyanoethylcyclohexanone, 4-ethylcyclohexanone, bicyclo[3.3.1]nonan-9-one, dihydrocarvone, 2-t-butylcyclohexanone, 3,3,5-trimethylcyclohexanone, 6-carbethoxy-2,6,6-trimethylcyclohexanone, 2,6,6-trimethylcyclohexanone, 2-ethoxycyclohexanone, 2,2,6,6-tetramethylcyclohexanone, 3-methylene-2-norbornanone, pulegone, and ethyl 2-oxo-1-cyclooctanecarboxylate.

8. (Currently Amended) A process for the preparation of lactones according to ~~any one of the preceding claims~~ claim 1 wherein the reaction temperature is maintained between 100 and 300°C.